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Meet Ada Polla

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Who Is She?

If your holiday wish list includes better-looking skin, Ada Polla is a good person to know. As the daughter of two Swiss medical doctors who are also entrepreneurs, Ada launched her parents' skincare company, Alchimie Forever, in the United States last year. Their products promise to help fight free radicals, brighten dull skin and diminish the appearance of wrinkles with natural ingredients like blueberries, oats, rosemary, green tea and grape seeds.



Ada Polla

Alchimie Forever primarily sells its creams, serums and masks to dermatology offices, but the products are also available online at www.alchimie-forever.com and at the two medical spas in Geneva founded by Ada's parents. Find out which new product Ada recommends for a winter self-pampering session...



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Landing a First Job - Without Family Connections

"After graduating from Harvard in 1999 with a double major in art history and political science, I wanted to prove that I could get a well-paying job without my family connections and went to work for a management consulting firm in Barcelona. Projects in Morocco and Boston gave me great business experience, but not enough experience - in my opinion - to make a valuable contribution to the family business."

Gaining Industry Smarts

"My father suggested I work for a medical device manufacturer - it was the best decision I made because I learned about the U.S. market for medical skin care and cosmetics and established many contacts in the dermatology world. The next step was for me to get my MBA. I hadn't done any quantitative finance work and felt that I was deluding myself if I thought I could succeed in business without those skills."

MBA Student AND Salesperson

"It takes an average of four years for a start-up to become profitable. I wanted to beat the average, so while in business school I researched the market for launching my parents' skin care line in the U.S., created the LLC and started selling. It was crazy - I was constantly trying to shift gears between my accounting project, trying to make a sales meeting and get back in time for my 6 p.m. class. But I needed to test the concept - if after nine months I had closed zero deals, I would have stopped."

Improving Your Skin Naturally

"Over the last year I have secured about 30 clients at dermatology offices. If you look at the skin care lines usually sold there, most are based on ingredients like vitamin C, alpha hydroxy acids and vitamin A derivatives. They're extremely effective at making the skin look better, but they can have side effects like redness, drying and peeling. Alchimie Forever products are based on natural antioxidants from plants that are more gentle."

Favorite Winter Product: A Pampering Mask

"We launched the Kantic Mask a few weeks ago and it has sold more than any other product at launch. It's meant to be a soothing, rejuvenating and moisturizing mask and contains blueberries to quell redness, speed the recovery of dry, distressed skin, as well as grape and wild pansy extracts to repair the look of past skin damage. People like a mask because it's a mini pampering session while they're feeling frenzied about everything that needs to happen before the New Year."

The Future of Alchimie Forever

"We're seeing more demand from consumers and dermatologists who want skin care products that are exclusive to the medical arena. Dermatologists don't want to sell something you can get at a department store. Our primary market will continue to be the medical community, but I'm also interested in expanding into about 25 high-end boutiques and medical spas around the country."

Greatest Challenge - Working Solo

"People don't tell you that starting your own business is lonely. I don't have the person across the hall or cubicle to brainstorm or grab a cup of coffee with. It's a challenge to self-motivate. Ninety-five percent of start-ups fail and that's a risk I have to mitigate. Some days it takes a big psychological effort to get up and go to the 'office' (my second bedroom) and balance the fact that it's difficult with the confidence that I'm going to succeed."

Personal Challenge - Making Time for Me

"I breathe, sleep and eat this business. It's tricky to close the door and pretend my office is far away. I just ran a marathon a few weeks ago, so I spent time training and I go to dinner parties. To escape from work, I like to watch a good movie or read a book."

Greatest Success - Taking the Risk

"The decision to do this and stick with it. It's difficult when you want to launch a business to actually do it. In your own mind, you'll never have enough experience. If you wait until you have enough experience, you'll either be old or dead. Working for a large company is quite comfortable - collecting a paycheck and having dental coverage, while you tell yourself you're gaining experience."

Words of Advice: On Venting

"Talk to entrepreneurs as much as possible to share common successes and frustrations. You can't vent to your employees. They look to you to be happy and confident that things are going well."

Words of Advice: On Timing

"To would-be entrepreneurs, I would say, 'Just do it.' Take a calculated risk. Put in time to think about your plan and market strategy. Right now I have limited risk - I'm getting married in December, but have no kids and no mortgage. Later you might not want to make your kids skip braces because your business is having trouble with cash flow."